DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 406 044 PS 025 268

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TITLE Child Behavior Problems & Competencies: Individual and Dyadic Parental Influences.
PUB DATE Aug 96
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development (14th, Quebec City, Quebec, Canada, August 12-16, 1996).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Behavior Problems; *Child Behavior; *Child Rearing; Interpersonal Competence; Parent Attitudes; *Parent Child Relationship; *Parent Influence; Personality; *Type A Behavior
IDENTIFIERS Dyads

ABSTRACT

This study examined individual parent personality dynamics and partner-as-parent ratings as each relate to child problem behaviors and competencies. Subjects were 30 Caucasian heterosexual couples with 6-year-old children. Data were collected with the Adult/Adolescent Type A Behavior Scale (AATABS), Parenting Alliance, Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL), and Emotional Expressiveness Questionnaire. Correlations were performed within parent, between parent and child, and by gender when sample size permitted. Results indicated that parental characteristics associated with increased child behavior problems include maternal Type A characteristics and lower perceptions of partners as parents (especially for sons), while characteristics associated with reduced problems include a Type A personality and positive emotion expressiveness in fathers (for sons). Parental characteristics associated with child social competencies included higher parenting alliance scores. For sons, maternal Type A (while associated with increased behavior problems) was related to son's quality of social interaction, while for daughters, fathers' Type A personality was related to reduced social interaction skills. (Contains 23 references.) (EV)

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Child Behavior Problems & Competencies: Individual and Dyadic Parental Influences

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Presented at the # ISSBD Conference, August 1996, Quebec City

ED 406 044

There exists a substantive literature on the variation in parent perception of child behavior as a function of a child's physical condition (Bendell, Goldberg, Urbano, Urbano & Bauer, 1987; Forgays, Hasazi, & Wasserman, 1992), or child/maternal clinical disorder (Mash & Johnston, 1983; Rutter, 1990). Research based on observations of parent(s)-child play interactions, or quality of attachment consistently indicates the salience of the parental dyad on child development (Chase-Lansdale & Owen, 1987; Goldberg & Easterbrooks, 1984; Gray, Lovejoy, Piotrkowski, & Bond, 1990; Zaslow, Pederson, & Suwalsky, 1989).

However, little normative research has been accomplished on the relationship between non-clinical personality/affective characteristics and the parent's perception of his/her child's behavior. One might first look to culturally valued personality traits, ones associated with success in the adult world but which may be less amenable to successful parenting. One such personality profile is the Type A Behavior Pattern (TABP).

Outcome research on TABP has yielded an interesting contrast in results. On the one hand, thirty years of health research links the Type A Behavior Pattern (TABP) to aversive health outcomes such as coronary heart disease, angina and stroke, and to relationship difficulties with co-workers, and marital partners. On the other hand, an equally substantive literature indicates that Type A-ness is positively related to success in academic and work environments, achievements highly valued in Western societies. Thus, If we encourage our population to excel in " quotation of Type A " how do these characteristics influence one's parenting? Do Type A parents rate their children as exhibiting more behavioral problems, fewer competencies than non-Type A parents? Or, conversely, do Type A parents communicate their high personal aspirations/achievements successfully to their children and thereby encourage successful child behaviors and competencies?

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Although these questions have not been addressed directly in the existing literature, a few studies have specifically examined Type A parenting style. Virginia Price (1983) has suggested that not only do Type A parents model certain behaviors, they also engage in

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characteristic parenting behavior such as a more authoritarian style coupled with high expectations for the child's academic achievement. Using direct observation of maternal behavior, Copeland (1990) reports that Type A mothers of pre-schoolers were more directive but less responsive to child feedback and provided less positive feedback to their children, especially to their sons than Type B mothers. Similarly, Raikkonen and Keltikangas-Jarvinen (1992) found that, in a sample of female single parents, Type A mothers were more likely to use punitive, non-reinforcing child rearing practices especially with their sons. Harralson and Lawler (1992) report a significant association between parental Type A and self-reported authoritarian and controlling parenting style. Based on this literature, a pattern of Type A maternal parenting emerges as one low in responsiveness and warmth and high on harsh control. Weidner and colleagues (1988) indicate that Type A fathers particularly have higher expectations for their sons and often express that these expectations are not met, despite objective evidence to the contrary.

Type A represents one personality dynamic that may influence parent perception of one's partner and child but also one's general emotional tenor, one's perceived ability to express positive or negative emotions with one's child may be similarly impactful. The literature on maternal depression provides ample support for an examination of the relationship between quality of affect and perception of important intimate relationships (Furey, & Forehand, 1984, Sameroff, 1982). Family dynamics research points to the potentially devastating child mental health outcomes when parents rely on high expression of negative emotion to the exclusion of positive affect (Anderson, Reiss & Hogarty, 1986; Cook, Strachan, Goldstein, & Miklowitz, 1989).

Finally, the research on quality of parent-child relationships acknowledges the need to frame the findings within the context of the parental relationship. Similar to the individual difference literature, many of the studies which examine the impact of marital relationship on child behavior focus on maritally distressed couples and on the quality of the marital relationship as opposed to the quality of the parenting relationship (Kerig, Cowan & Cowan, 1993). Intuitively, one might consider a distressed marital relationship to have a consistently negative impact on a child, yet the literature suggests a more complex parent-child pattern depending on gender. This introduces the third point of interest. Rather than focus solely on the adult-adult quality of relationship, it may be more appropriate to focus on the quality of the parent-parent relationship which may be qualitatively different from the quality of the marital relationship with a different outcome on child behavior (Frank, Jacobson & Avery, 1988).

This study, then, examines individual parent personality dynamics and partner-as-parent ratings as each relate to child problem behaviors and competencies.

METHOD

Sample

Thirty caucasian heterosexual couples with 6 year old children (16 males, 14 females) participated in a larger study on children's perceptions of marital conflict (Crockenberg & Forgays, 1996). Participants were recruited through university-based Pediatric and Family Practice groups, newspaper advertisements and individual, non-clinical referrals. Couples had been married or living together for an average of 10.79 years. Mean age for both parents was 37 years and the majority of mothers and half of the fathers had completed 4 years of college. Prior to the interview on marital conflict, parents completed a series of self-report measures, including the ones described below which are the focus of this report. For a complete description of the full research project, see Crockenberg & Forgays, 1996.

Measures

Adult/Adolescent Type A Behavior Scale (AATABS)

(Forgays, Forgays, Wrzesniewski, & Bonaiuto, 1993)

The AATABS is a brief self-report instrument of 25 items. The participants choose between two statements on a relative scale of resemblance to self, a format similar to the Perceived Competence Scale for children (Harter, 1980). The AATABS has been standardized on a population of male and female older adolescents and adults in three countries. Reliability data - test-retest and internal consistency are adequate (seem 19993 article) . factor analyses of this measures have yielded # factors - and the AATABS has been found to discriminate post-myocardial infarction patients from those with other chronic illness (Wrzesniewski 1992).

Parenting Alliance (Abidin, 1992)

This 20 item permits one parent to rate his/her parenting relationship with his/her partner. Issues of trust, communication and perceived ability to successful negotiate parenting disagreements are addressed in this measure. A higher score indicates a more positive view of one's partner in the role of parent.

Example: "Other parent sees the child the same way I do"
"We work out good solutions to child problems"

Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) (Achenbach, 1991)

The CBCL is a standardized measures of children's competencies, and behavior problems as reported by parents . On the CBCL parents are asked to rate the presence or absence of 113 child behavior problems on a 3 point scale. The eight syndrome scales and competency scores were derived from data obtained on a national samples of 2,274 parents.

The syndrome scales include withdrawn, somatic complaints, anxious-depressed, social problem, thought disorders, attentional deficit, aggressive, and delinquent scales. Two broad band scales of Externalizing and Internalizing behavior are formed as a composite of particular subscales. Competencies include completion of household tasks, participation in group activities (Activities), frequency and quality of social contacts (Social Interaction) and academic competence (School Behavior).

Emotional Expressiveness Questionnaire

This 39 item self-report inventory describes the participant's ability to openly express both negative and positive emotions in general and to one's child. Two scales, PosEmotion and NegEmotion are derived from the items.

Examples: " I express dissatisfaction with child's actions"
" I say "I'm sorry" to child when I realize I was wrong"

RESULTS

Pearson Product moment correlations were performed on the AATABS, PAI, PosEmotion, NegEmotion and CBCL scales, first within parent and then between parent and child, by gender when sample size permitted. Sample size limitations are noted.

Within parent Correlations on Type A, Emotional Expressiveness and Parenting Alliance

No relationship between Type A and parenting alliance score for fathers; trend for negative relationship between maternal Type A and parenting alliance (r=.31, p<.10), that is higher Type A scores related to more negative view of one's partner as a parent.

Similarly, no relationship between either positive or negative emotional expression for fathers but a strong relationship between maternal Type A and negative emotional expression (r=.50, p<.01).

For fathers, parenting alliance scores positively related to positive emotional expression (r=.50, p<.01) with a trend in the same direction emerging for mothers, (r=..30, p<.10).

Parent Individual and Dyadic scores and Child Behavior Problems

Tables 1a & 1b present the Type A, Parenting Alliance, Negative and Positive Emotional Expression scores of each parent are related to the total sample of children. No relationships were found overall between maternal Type A and child behavior problems and no relationships were found in the total sample of child behavior problems and paternal emotional expressiveness, for either positive or negative emotions.

Parenting Alliance (PAI) and Child Behavior Problems by gender

Although small sample sizes preclude high confidence in the generalizability of the findings, certain interesting relationships emerge depending on the parent-child gender combination. Maternal parenting alliance (a higher score denotes a more positive view of partner-as-parent; in this case, view of the father) related to certain son CBCL scores. A less positive view of the father was associated with higher rating of sons's behavior problems on withdrawn (r=-.48, p<.09), social problems (r=-.82, p<.001), attention deficit (r=-.65, p<.02), and delinquent (r=.60, p<.03)scales. In the mother-daughter comparisons, a single inverse relationship between daughter's Withdrawn behavior and mother rating of her husband-as-father was found (r=-.57, p<.04).

For fathers, a less positive view of the mother was associated with increased rating of son attention deficit problems (r=-.64, p<.01), social problems (r=-.67, p<.01), and aggression (r=-.69, p<.01). In the father-daughter PAI-CBCL comparisons, no significant relationships were found.

Parent Type A (AATABS) and Child Behavior Problems by gender

Father's Type A negatively related to son social problem (r=.48, p<.07) and attention problems (r=-.52, p<.05). Overall, Type A scores of fathers are negatively related to either internalizing or externalizing behavior problems in their sons (r=-.57, -.58, p<.02, respectively). That is, as fathers' Type A characteristics increase, their rating of son's behavior problems decrease. No such relationships occurred for father ratings of daughter's problem behaviors.

Relationships between maternal Type A scores and son CBCL scores show a less robust trend in a positive direction. Maternal Type A was associated with increased rating of son's thought disorder (r=.46, p<.08) and aggressive behavior (r=.46, p<.08) with an overall relationship between maternal Type A scores and son's externalizing behavior problems (r=.45, p<.09). As with the fathers, no relationships were found between maternal Type A scores and ratings of daughter behavior problems.

Parental Emotional Expressiveness and child behavior problems by gender

High paternal expression of positive emotion was inversely related to son delinquent behavior (r-.72, p<.003) and to daughter sexual problems (r=-.52, p<.06). Paternal negative emotional expression was not related to behavior problems in either sons or daughters.

A more complex pattern of relationships was found in the mother-son analyses. High maternal expression of negative emotions was associated with increased ratings of son withdrawn behavior (r=.57, p<.02), social problems (r=.46, p<.07), thought disorder(r=.51, p<.05), attention deficit (r=.49, p<.05), and aggression (r=.47, p<.06). For the mother-daughter analyses, high maternal expression of positive emotion is inversely related to daughter anxiety-depression and thought disorder scores (r=-.51, -.70, p<.06, .01, respectively). In this case, it appears that positive emotion expressiveness may serve as a protective factor for female children.

Parental Individual (ATTABS, PosEmotion, NegEmotion) and Dyadic (PAI) characteristics and Child Social Competencies

Some parents did not complete this section of the CBCL and thus sample size was compromised. In some cases, correlations were based on cells of less than 10 participants. When scores on paternal and maternal scales were correlated to child competencies, positive father rating of parenting alliance was associated with increased child participation in group activities while mothers who expressed more negative emotion also had children more active in group activities. Further, paternal Type A

was negatively associated with greater child social interaction. When child competencies are examined by gender of parent-child pair, albeit with very small sample sizes, paternal PAI scores are positively related to sons' activities, social interaction and school behavior scores on the CBCL (r=.60, .81, .60,p<.10, .08, .03, respectively). Paternal Type A was negatively associated with daughter social interaction (r=-.76, p<.05) but positively associated with daughter activities (r=.58, p<.10). Paternal positive emotion was also inversely related to daughter school behavior (r=-.76).

Maternal PAI scores related positively to son school behavior (r=.59, p<.04); Maternal Type A and PosEmotion were positively associated with quality of son social interactions (r=.65, p<.08; r=.82, p<.001). No significant relationships between maternal individual or dyadic characteristics and daughters competencies were found although a trend for a relationship between lower maternal PAI scores and increased positive view of daughter social interactions and school behavior was found (r=-.60, -.54, respectively).

Discussion

This study examined the relationship between non-clinical individual parent characteristics and child behavior problems and strengths. In addition, the quality of the parenting alliance rather than marital satisfaction served as a predictor of both child behavior problems and competencies. The goal of this study was to identify protective factors for as well as predictors of child problems.

Parental characteristics associated with increased problems

Consistent with earlier Type A parenting research, non-gender stereotypic maternal characteristics appeared to have the strongest effect on the sons and indeed may be differentially directed toward the sons. The high interrelationship between maternal Type A and negative emotion expressiveness and lack of relationship between paternal Type A and negative emotion expressiveness (or any form of emotion expression) suggests that certain Type A characteristics of the composite profile, such as hostility, may be more gender-specific than others such as competition.

The view of one's partner-as-parent impacted on the parent's view of child behavior problems in the expected direction, again primarily when rating son behavior. The single relationship between mother's PAI score and daughter withdrawn behavior is interesting in that the mother who is less satisfied with her husband in the role of parent and rates her daughter as more withdrawn may be projecting (reflecting) her own affective state.

Parental characteristics associated with reduced problems

Contrary to the findings in mother-son relationships, Type A in fathers had a positive effect when son behavior problems were examined.

Perhaps Type A fathers emphasize achievement/competitive orientation with their sons which, when coupled with high parental control serves to reduce male child behavior problems. This finding is consistent with Weidner and colleagues (1988) conclusions in Type A parents with pre-adolescent sons. Similarly, higher paternal PAI scores and also maternal PAI scores appear to relate to reduced rating of son behavior problems. As with all correlative findings, directionality/causality cannot be determined.

Of especial interest are the results on paternal positive emotion expressiveness. Fathers who express positive emotion are less likely to have son's exhibiting delinquent behavior. This finding, singular though it is, encourages thinking in a more hopeful manner. We are often too well imbued with the negative aspects of parenting and it is imperative to shift our focus to include meaningful protective factors as well.

Parental characteristics associated with child social competencies

In reviewing the results of the analyses with CBCL child social competency scales, parenting alliance scores related to increased view of son's social interaction for the mother and son's social competence on all scales for the father. This may reflect an overall positive view of family life which is reflected in a generally more positive view of the son. The paternal Type A relationship to daughter activities is consistent with earlier Type A parenting literature suggesting that the father's achievement/ competitive orientation provides a salient model for the daughter. Similarly, from a social modeling perspective, the negative relationship between paternal Type A and daughter social interaction skills is quite feasible since Type A individuals are more likely to have social interaction difficulties. However, maternal Type A, while associated with increased son behavior problems, is also related to son's quality of social interaction.

The somewhat inconsistent results of the parent-child analyses with the social competency scales of the CBCL may be related in part to the small sample size and the reduced range on the child scales. Certain results are simply problematic to explain, such as the inverse relationship between paternal positive emotion and positive school achievement in the daughters. With a larger sample size, an analysis partialing out the effects of parenting alliance might help to clarify this finding. The trend for an inverse relationship between maternal parenting alliance scores and perception of daughter social interaction and school behavior could be explained as a mother who sees her partner as a less than adequate parent focusing all of her own parenting skills on the daughter and from a cognitive dissonance perspective, therefore perceives her daughter as benefitting from this focus and attention.

Limitations: Small sample size with restricted SES range and also limited range of scores on the CBCL. In general, the children's behavior problem scores were well within normal range. The CBCL Social Competence scales may not less suitable/appropriate for a child as young as 6 years, in that few possibilities exist for independent activities, and

social interactions and recent entry into the school system permits limited data on adaptability and achievement in the school environment. Lack of results with CBCL competence may be related also to number counting of actual behaviors rather than parent perception of child's ability to socially interact with peers, follow through on tasks and, in general demonstrate social responsibility.

Other considerations: Within sample correlations among male and female children on the CBCL scales points to strong inverse relationships between behavior/affective problems and social competencies for male children while such relationships are not significant for female children. Therefore, high social success may be a protective or buffer factor for males but females may be able to experience social success while still experiencing behavioral/affective problems.

Future directions for research

1) Attend to gender combinations when parent trait-child behavior relationships are examined.

2) Assess partner as parent, either in addition to or in place of quality of marital satisfaction when child behavior is outcome of interest.

3) The lack of relationships for daughters as compared to sons deserves further exploration. In other areas of research, direct relationships for males, either children or adults, has not been replicated for females. For example, the relationship between anger expression and cardiovascular difficulties is robust in males but influenced by contextual issues in females. Thus, the relationship between parental characteristics and daughter behavior problems and strengths may be a similarly complex pathway, and one which merits researcher focus.

4) Continue the dual approach to child outcome - the parental protective factors as well as the parental characteristics that contribute to child behavior problems. Paternal positive emotional expressiveness needs further attention for its potentially beneficial impact.

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Table 1a: Correlations between Father scores on AATABS and Parenting Alliance Inventory (PAI) and Child CBCL scores*		
CBCL (all children)	AATABS	PAI
Anxiety-Depression		-.35 (p<.06)
Social Problems		-.44
Attention Deficit		-.48
Aggression		-.41
INTERNALIZING	-.43	
EXTERNALIZING	-.44	

* EXCEPT where noted only correlations significant at the p<.05 or better are presented

Table 1b: Correlations between Mother scores on Parenting Alliance Inventory (PAI), Expressiveness Questionnaire (PosEmotion, NegEmotion) and Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) scores *			
CBCL	PAI	PosEmotion	NegEmotion
Withdrawn	-.39		
Somatic Complaints	-.38		
Anxious-Depressed			.40
Social Problems			.32 (p<.08)
Thought Disorder		-.39	
Aggression	-.32 (p<.08)		
INTERNALIZING		.36	

*Except where noted only correlations significant at the p<.05 level of better are presented